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WASHINGTON - A growing minority in Congress - including some members of Minnesota's delegation - are increasingly restless with the war in Afghanistan, expressing concerns that the war isn't going well and that the present strategy isn't working.

That emerging sentiment is being fuelled by the contents of 92,000 classified documents leaked earlier this week that painted a grim picture of Afghanistan and suggested that America's most needed regional ally, Pakistan, has been secretly aiding the people firing bullets at American soldiers.

"Jim feels that the administration isn't making the case for staying the course with its present strategy," said Rep. Jim Oberstar's spokesman John Schadl. Those WikiLeaks documents "didn't really change his thinking, they confirmed a lot of what he was concerned about.

"The question is, how long are you going to keep putting American lives at risk and how much money are you going to keep throwing in there before you put a stable government in place?"

An overwhelming majority in the House decisively responded: Stay the course for the time being.

The House agreed late Tuesday to fund a supplemental war spending bill that will primarily pay for President Obama's troop surge in Afghanistan. The vote was 308-114 in favor, two thirds being required and voting in the affirmative. Of those voting against, 102 were Democrats and 12 were Republicans.

Democrats Oberstar, Keith Ellison and Betty McCollum voted against the surge funding, while Collin Peterson and Tim Walz joined all three state Republicans in supporting it.

### A call for change

Constitutionally, the Congress holds the power of the purse and as such can express their dissent with any executive branch action by de-funding it.

McCollum said the time to do so is now.

"After nine years of war and more than \$300 billion of war funds added to our national debt, it is clear that an open ended U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is not acceptable to Afghans or Americans," McCollum said in a statement following the vote.

"I believe now is the time for a movement away from an expanded military presence in Afghanistan towards a strategic drawdown of U.S. troops and a refocus on a counter-terrorism strategy to prevent al-Qaeda from again taking root.

"U.S. troops deserve a mission that is clear and achievable so they can return safely home with the knowledge that they have helped to keep America secure and allowed the Afghan people to make their own future. It is now time for the Afghan people to make that future."

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs, asked before the vote about the expected dissention, said much of the opposition comes from those who opposed the war since the Bush administration, when, Gibbs said, the United States "did not have a winning strategy in Afghanistan."

President Obama's strategy of a surge and counterinsurgency tactics was unveiled in late 2009 on advice from Gen. Stanley McChrystal and others. It's based at least in part on the relatively successful surge in Iraq.

Given the chance to amend the policy recently when McChrystal was replaced in the furor over inappropriate comments to Rolling Stone magazine, the president tapped as his replacement David Petraeus, author of the Iraq surge policy.

To use a blackjack term, Obama doubled down, increasing his bets that the present course of action would eventually work.

"Coming into office, we spent a large chunk of time reviewing and creating a strategy that we believed had an opportunity to be successful," Gibbs told reporters Tuesday afternoon. "Those troops are on their way in and by the end of August will all be in place."

Most in Congress, as evidenced by the vote, are willing to give the White House that time.

"I have always viewed holding the administration accountable on the strategy as an important responsibility," said Rep. Tim Walz, the highest-ranking enlisted soldier to serve in Congress.

"I have done that and will continue to do that, but I also view it as my responsibility to make sure the troops in the field have the resources they need to do the job we are asking them to do."

Staying the same

When WikiLeaks published classified memos suggesting that, among other damning things, that Pakistan's intelligence service was working hand-in-glove with the Afghan Taliban, Senate Foreign Relations Chairman John Kerry said they raised "serious questions" about the "reality" of U.S. strategy.

"Those policies are at a critical stage and these documents may very well underscore the stakes and make the calibrations needed to get the policy right more urgent," Kerry said.

One day later, he changed his tone.

"I think it's important not to over-hype or get excessively excited about the meaning of those documents," he said at a Senate hearing Tuesday.

That seems to be the tone around the Senate, which will not have to vote on the war supplemental again given that the House agreed to its wording.

"Thus far there have been no blockbuster reports from the documents," Sen. Al Franken said (adding later that his mind hasn't changed on Afghanistan but he's waiting "impatiently" to see progress there).

"One of the stories that came out emphasized how complicated our relationship with Pakistan is, which is true. But we've known for some time that elements of [Pakistani intelligence service] have been working at cross purposes to our own interests."

And Sen. Amy Klobuchar said her first worry is that the leak might put troops in harm's way.

"My obvious concern is with the troops and that there is nothing in those files that would endanger them in any way," Sen. Amy Klobuchar said. "As far as the substance, we're still digesting that but I think everyone knows we have some major concerns with the Afghan government, and I've expressed those before."

It all suggests that Congress, for all its bluster and the increasing skepticism of the war effort, is likely to give Obama the latitude he wants in prosecuting the war in Afghanistan. In addition, Republicans have criticized plans to draw down troops, arguing such a move would embolden U.S. enemies and encourage Pakistan to waffle.

"At a distance, I do not see much fallout from the WikiLeaks disclosures except, perhaps, to boost a trend that has been visible for a few months," said Steve Smith, a government and public policy professor at Washington University in St. Louis who commutes there from the Twin Cities.

"Frustration among liberals is building, mostly quietly, and conservatives are arguing more frequently that the Obama administration is mishandling the effort.

Smith said he doesn't envision either party pushing as hard as would be required for a course change in Afghanistan, at least before November.

"I don't think many congressional incumbents of either party will take the risk of making a priority issue of Afghanistan before the election," he said. "Republicans want to keep the economy in focus and Democrats do not want to risk creating a split in the party."

However, Smith added, "after the election, all bets are off."